# Spark Blamed for Flash Fire

## Gasoline Linked in Mishicot Probe

MISHICOT — A spark from an electric motor touched off a flash fire, fed on gasoline from an abandoned tank, that took the life of George W. Schmidt, 75. and gutted his home Monday noon.

That was the opinion of State Fire Marshal Earl Schwabe of Brillion and Manitowoc County Sheriff Alvin Gill Wednesday.

The two spent the morning investigating the burned out property before making their joint statement. First reports from volunteer firemen at the scene Monday indicated the explosion was from a short circuit in a sump pump which had started a fire in an oil furnace.

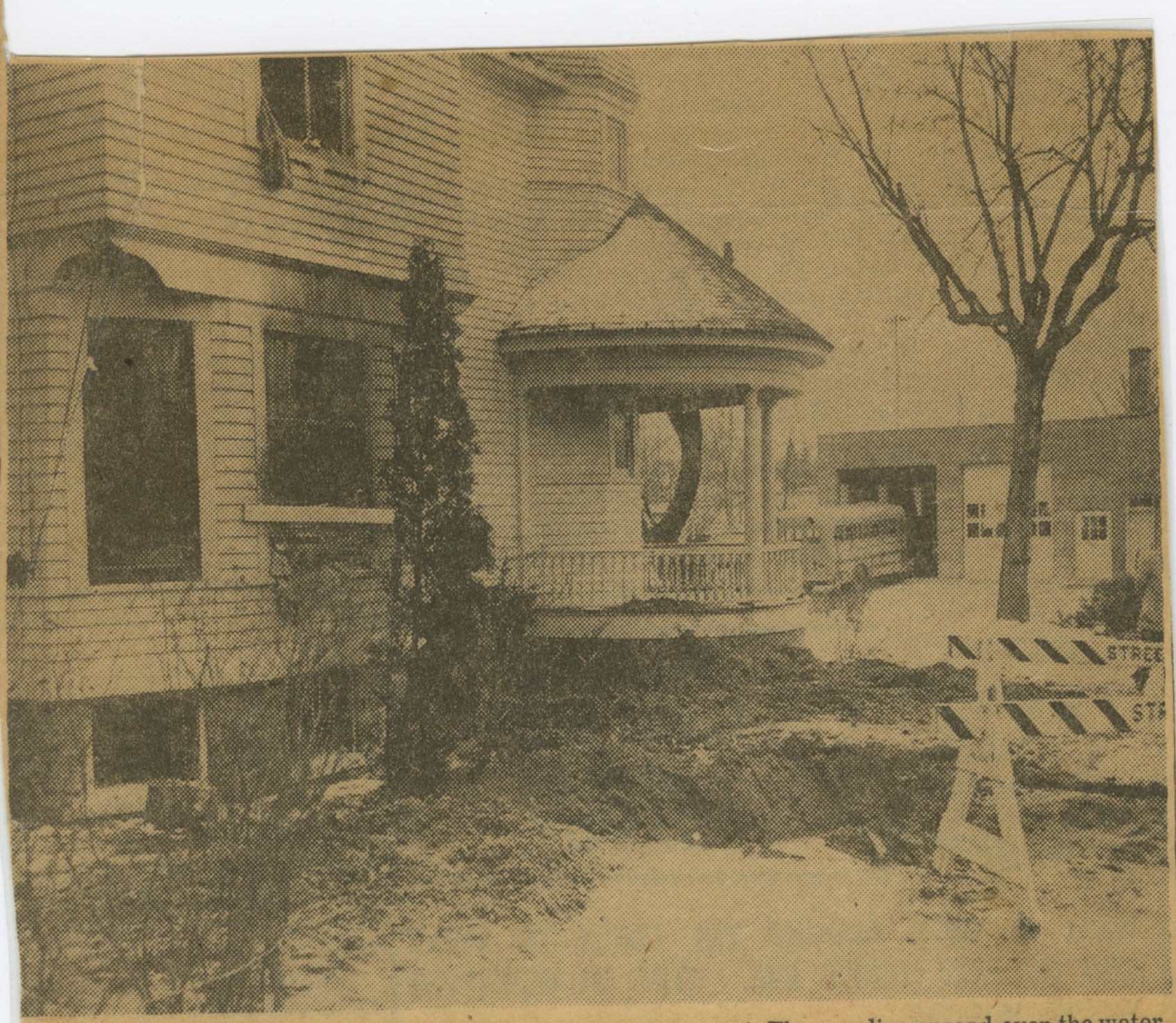
**Pump Disconnected**

Schwabe and Gill said the sump pump had been disconnected and that there was no short circuit in electric wiring. The sump pump was at the opposite end of the basement where the fire occurred. The furnace was intact.

The fire, they said, was probably caused by a spark from an electric motor running a refrigerator. A gasoline slick on the water ignited.

The gasoline came from the tank, unused for about 15 years, forced through pipes into the basement by percolating water. Heavy rains and mild temperatures over the weekend had softened the frost crust, enabling water

(Continued on Page M-11)



**WHERE IT STARTED**—A buried gasoline tank on the west side of the George W. Schmidt residence at Mishicot is believed to have supplied fuel for a flash fire that trapped Schmidt, causing his death, and gutting the interior of the home Monday noon. Heavy rains and melting snow filtered into the rusted tank and forced some of the gasoline in the tank through pipes and into the basement. The gasoline spread over the water in the basement and a spark from a refrigerator motor is thought to have touched off the flash fire. Wednesday the tank was dug out and examined, smashed and buried in its original hole in the foreground. The gasoline had been used years ago for illumination and cooking. (Photo by staff photographer)